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Embassy Admits Radiation Exists

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MOSCOW, Feb. 10 — American officials confirmed tonight that there is a radiation problem in the U.S. embassy building here — apparently caused by Soviet surveillance equipment — but they refused to discuss the extent of the danger to embassy personnel and others who use the building.

As explained by officials, the radiation is of the non-ionized variety found in medical equipment and microwave ovens. They said that scientific investigations of this type of radiation have not been conclusive as to the threshold where danger begins.

At a briefing called to "allay fears" in the American community, officials said there "is no significant health hazard" on the ground floor of the embassy where such facilities as the nursery school and snack bar are located.

Journalists, businessmen and others who come to the embassy occasionally, officials said, "are in no danger."

The implication seemed to be that the hazard is greater in the offices of the embassy on the upper floors of the ten-story building — but just how great was not disclosed. To all questions on that, officials answered "no comment" and said they were doing so on instructions.

About 125 people work in the embassy and 48 live there, including a number of children. It is unclear whether the apartments are considered hazardous.

Reports of the radiation problem began circulating last week when the embassy scheduled and then cancelled a general briefing. After a smaller session was held with key personnel Friday, reports circulated attributing the radiation to Soviet microwave beams apparently designed to activate surveillance equipment already installed in the embassy.

At today's briefing, the officials would not say whether the radiation was caused by surveillance equipment. But this has been the repeated assertion of other sources who would not allow themselves to be quoted.

Yesterday, wives of the embassy officers were given a briefing, apparently similar to the one today. While stressing that there is no reason for outsiders to be worried, officials frequently stated that the full effects of this type of radiation are poorly understood.

Sources said that in past years, at least, there have been no medical incidents among members of the American community that could be attributed to radiation effects. However, it is acknowledged that medical records of past embassy employees are being scrutinized.

An official said that a laboratory specialist had been assigned to Moscow to perform periodic tests on embassy staff in an effort to discover what consequences — if any — are caused by the radiation.